

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY APRIL 23, 2015

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY APRIL 13, 2015

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY MARCH 26, 2015

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE—2015–16 REGULAR SESSION

ASSEMBLY BILL

No. 75

Introduced by Assembly Member Mathis
(Coauthor: Assembly Member Brough)

January 5, 2015

An act relating to veterans, and making an appropriation therefor.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 75, as amended, Mathis. Veterans.

Existing law, the Budget Act of 2014, appropriates \$3,000,000 to the Department of Veterans Affairs for the purpose of assisting the United States Department of Veterans Affairs in processing veterans' claims.

This bill would *continuously* appropriate \$3,000,000 *from the General Fund each fiscal year* to the Department of Veterans Affairs for the purpose of funding ~~those Veteran~~ *36 Veterans* Claims Representative positions.

Vote: $\frac{2}{3}$. Appropriation: yes. Fiscal committee: yes.
State-mandated local program: no.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

- 1 SECTION 1. The Legislature finds and declares:
- 2 (a) The Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) works to serve
- 3 California veterans and their families. With nearly two million
- 4 veterans living in the state, CalVet strives to ensure that its veterans

1 of every era and their families receive the state and federal benefits
2 and services they have earned and deserve as a result of their
3 selfless and honorable military service. CalVet strives to serve
4 veterans and their families with dignity and compassion and to
5 help them achieve their highest quality of life.

6 (b) In 2013, the Legislature and Governor Jerry Brown
7 authorized \$3 million and 36 limited-term positions that allowed
8 CalVet to coordinate with the United States Department of
9 Veterans Affairs (VA) to assist in reducing its massive veterans'
10 claims backlog in the three California VA Regional Offices.

11 (c) The funds appropriated were used to hire three teams of 12
12 Veterans Claims Representatives (VCR), one team for each of the
13 VA's regional offices in the Cities of Los Angeles, Oakland, and
14 San Diego to focus on backlogged claims, ensuring they are
15 properly developed and have all necessary documentation needed
16 for adjudication.

17 (d) At the time the CalVet Strike Teams were initially deployed
18 in the Fall of 2013, the national average wait time for benefits from
19 the federal government was 349.6 days. This meant the average
20 veteran waited nearly a year before receiving benefits that they
21 had earned through their honorable military service. The average
22 wait times in the Cities of Los Angeles and Oakland were
23 significantly worse than the national average, at 619.4 days and
24 617.8 days, respectively.

25 (e) As of January 29, 2015, CalVet Strike Team claims review
26 efforts in the Cities of Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Diego, ~~San Diego~~ *Diego*,
27 including reviewing 44,921 claims, ~~resulting~~ *have resulted* in
28 one-time lump sum payments to California veterans totaling
29 \$45,603,451, *and* monthly award payments totaling \$5,878,940,
30 which result in annualized award payments of \$70,547,276 going
31 to California veterans every year for the rest of their lives.

32 (f) While the Strike Teams have done remarkable work, the
33 mission is still not complete as the VA is still not on pace to fully
34 eliminate its claims backlog by the end of next year, a goal long
35 promised by the VA officials.

36 (g) Whereas the Strike Teams have addressed the initial claims
37 backlog for the VA's three regional offices in California, the
38 appeals of claims decisions and the dependent claims have been
39 pushed back and will remain unresolved for many months, if not
40 years, should the Strike Team positions are not further funded.

1 (h) It is the intent of the Legislature to provide the CalVet with
2 the requisite staff to review and ensure quality, timeliness, and
3 accuracy of claims filed on behalf of the veterans of California
4 and their families.

5 (i) California veterans have served their country and their
6 communities with honor and distinction, and deserve the benefits
7 that have been promised to them.

8 ~~SEC. 2. The sum of three million dollars (\$3,000,000) is hereby~~
9 ~~appropriated to the Department of Veterans Affairs for the purpose~~
10 ~~of permanently funding 36 full-time equivalent Veterans Claims~~
11 ~~Representative positions in the Department of Veterans Affairs'~~
12 ~~Veteran Services Division. These 36 Veterans Claims~~
13 ~~Representatives shall have oversight by the California Department~~
14 ~~of Veterans Affairs, and ensure the quality and timeliness of claims~~
15 ~~filed through the federal Department of Veterans Affairs on behalf~~
16 ~~of California veterans and their families.~~

17 *SEC. 2. Notwithstanding Section 13340 of the Government*
18 *Code, the sum of three million dollars (\$3,000,000) is hereby*
19 *continuously appropriated, without regard to fiscal years, from*
20 *the General Fund each fiscal year to the Department of Veterans*
21 *Affairs, exclusively for the purpose of funding 36 full-time*
22 *equivalent Veterans Claims Representative positions in the*
23 *Department of Veterans Affairs' Veteran Services Division. These*
24 *36 Veterans Claims representatives shall have oversight by the*
25 *California Department of Veterans Affairs, and ensure the quality*
26 *and timeliness of claims filed through the federal Department of*
27 *Veterans Affairs on behalf of California veterans and their families.*

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